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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Radio Service
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "TURKEY TAKES THE CURE." Information from the Bureau of Animal Industry, United States Department of Agriculture. Publication offered: "Suggestions on Curing and Smoking Turkey."

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The cave man started it all. He's the one to blame for our appetite for meat flavored with smoke. At least my guess is that he was the first to discover how good meat can be with a smoky taste. But I have no idea who first discovered that meat cured in a salt mixture and then smoked also is delicious. I only know that curing and smoking are both very old processes, dating far back into history. But the idea of applying these processes to poultry instead of pork -- especially of curing and smoking turkey -- that's something rather new, and it's something that listeners have been inquiring a good deal about lately.

When I was trying to trace the history of smoked turkey, I came upon a story about the former Kaiser of Germany. The story goes that the Kaiser had a servant who was an expert at curing meat and even tried his art on some of the Kaiser's prize turkeys. The Kaiser found the cured and smoked turkey meat so delicious that he sent it as a Christmas gift to his royal relatives in England. From the tables of royalty, it gradually found its way to America. Today in a number of resturants catering to epicures smoked turkey is a special feature. Whole smoked turkey or smoked turkey in pieces for appetizers is also on sale at many food shops.

Department of Agriculture meat experts say that the demand for smoked turkey may benefit the turkey-raiser who has a surplus crop, or who is looking for a way to use the very large birds that nowadays sell only to hotels and restaurants. As you know, most homes today haven't ovens, or pans, or families large enough to cook or eat a 15 or 20-pounder. So these big birds have sometimes gone begging.

A year ago at the Department of Agriculture research center at Beltsville, Md., meat experts began studying the curing, smoking, and storage of turkeys. They made this study to be able to give accurate reliable directions to turkey raisers or others interested in the process. They haven't yet finished this study but it is far enough along so that the Department now has mimeographed directions to send inquirers. By the way, if you want to prepare turkey this way, write to the Radio Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and ask for smoked turkey information. It is free.

Even if you aren't going to do any smoking yourself, you may sometime be eating smoked turkey and you may want to know how it is prepared.

The Department men who worked on this problem advise preparing turkey for smoking as you would for cooking. After killing and picking the birds,

remove the head, feet, neck, and viscera leaving the body cavity open at both fore and rear ends. Then chill the dressed birds to an internal temperature way down to between 30 and 40 degrees F.

Now the bird is ready to go into the brine mixture for curing. During the study, they packed the dressed turkeys, each weighing approximately 16 and a half pounds in a 50-gallon barrel. You can use a crock or any clean, well-soaked, odorless, hardwood barrel. Hold the turkeys down with a clean brick or stone weight or even with a clean board so they won't float when you pour in the curing mixture.

The mixture recommended is 6 pounds common salt; 3 pounds sugar; 3 ounces saltpeter dissolved in 4 and a half gallons of water. In the study they found that about 4 times this quantity of curing mixture covered 100 pounds of dressed turkeys in a 50-gallon barrel.

Temperature and time of curing are just as important with turkeys as with other meat. In the study they found that the temperature of both the turkey and the liquid around it should be 38 degrees F. -- 38 degrees from the start to the finish of the cure.

They also found that good-sized turkeys need at least 3 weeks of curing because the salt penetrates the thicker parts of the bird slowly. The rule suggested for curing time is to allow a day and a half in the brine for every pound of dressed bird. Each week during the cure the turkeys need to be removed from the barrel and repacked to remix the pickle and make sure that the cure has an equal chance at all parts.

Finally, about smoking the turkey. Wash the cured bird in warm water, hang to dry, then smoke with hard wood. (Some say apple wood is best.) The temperature of the smokehouse may be 100 to 110 degrees F. The turkey hangs by its wings so the smoke can reach as much skin as possible and so any curing fluid will drain out of the body cavity. For a mild flavor, several hours of smoking may be enough. For a stronger flavor, the smoking may continue several days. But one thing to remember about smoking is that it dries out the meat and the more the meat dries out, the greater the concentration of salt and, of course, the stronger the flavor.

There's the story of smoked turkey from the caveman to the Kaiser and finally to the Department of Agriculture. Let me say again, if you want the directions for this process, write to the Radio Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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